What kind of beer do you like? Who brewed it? Where did he or she brew it and where are you enjoying it? Answers to those questions shed light on stories of immigration, urban change, technological innovation, and evolving consumer tastes. This is because brewing history is American history; the nation’s most significant historical events can be tracked through the lens of beer. In January 2017, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History launched the American Brewing History Initiative, a project to build an archive of American beer and brewing history with a focus on 20th-century stories of homebrewing and craft beer. This talk will review the initiative’s work in the realm of collecting, oral histories, exhibitions, and public outreach. It will also explore the project’s unique opportunities and challenges related to collecting the history and culture of a sensory subject; preserving the material culture of a contemporary cultural phenomenon; and communicating with diverse audiences.

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